Social Status and Guidance Involvement

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This is a study of the relationships of 3 measures of social stratification to students' utilization of school guidance services and knowledgeability about chosen vocation. A survey of students in 8 high schools suggests that, in a majority of the groups studied, social status of parents and projected social status of the student (based upon chosen occupation) are positively related to knowledgeability about chosen career. The extent of the student's utilization of career guidance services was related to his social status within the microcosm of the school as defined by amount of participation in valued extracurricular activities. Parental and projected social status measures did not appear to be so consistently related to utilization of career guidance. The degree of the student's participation in other guidance services not directed at career planning was, in a majority of the groups studied, negatively related to the social status of the student's parents.

THIS STUDY seeks to establish the relationship between the social status of high school students and the extent of their involvement in the guidance services provided for them in the schools.

The selection process, that process operating through the school that allocates students to more or less favorable occupational positions, has been shown to maintain the existing stratification order. Individuals pursue careers, the status of which is compatible with the status of the occupations of their fathers (Bendix & Lipset, 1953; Davidson & Anderson, 1937; and Krippner, 1963). The explanation for this phenomenon, advanced earlier by Warner (1956), assumes the operation of a two-way relationship. On the one hand, individuals assume the value orientations of their social class toward education and careers. On the other hand, the school functions to reinforce those values that are peculiar to the middle class. Empirical evidence has been provided by Rosen (1956), Hollingshead (1958), Kahl (1953) and Warner (1949).

The middle-class bias of *teachers* has been imputed by several authors. Becker (1952) demonstrated that teachers' reactions to lower-class children were highly stereotyped in the direction of unpleasing qualities. Hollingshead (1949) and War-

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ner (1949) both showed how the treatment accorded lower-class children made it difficult for these children to achieve any kind of upward mobility.

The institution-wide application of preferential treatment appears to be implicit in a number of studies. The same bias was shown by Hollingshead and Redlich (1958) to be operating in psychiatric agencies. The extension of this to the educational counseling enterprise is both logical and necessary.

WHO RECEIVES GUIDANCE?

The question that has been asked in this research is "Do students with varying social backgrounds, expressing differently valued career aspirations and participating to varying degrees in activities valued by the school, receive and take advantage of guidance services d i f f e r e n t i a l l y?" Whether the school is operating to confer preferential treatment through the guidance facility or whether individual students are differentially motivated to seek out and take advantage of the guidance program is, however, not a question that can be answered here.

The guidance services that are ordinarily made available to high school students take several forms. While the quantity of school counselors varies, usually in ratio to the socio-economic status of the community, most high schools have at least one functionary who serves in a guidance capacity. The two most important functions, as far as student-counselor interaction is concerned, are those of career counseling and "adjustment" counseling. Sometimes these goals are combined but it is usually clear to the student, whose responses were important to this study, just what it is that occasioned his visit to the guidance office. The first service emphasizes to the student the importance of career planning, particularly occupational and educational decisions. A second service revolves around the need to collect information about individuals in a helping relationship where "adjustment" or satisfactory "adaptation" to the expectations of the institution are involved.

Cicourel and Kitsuse (1963), in an important study, have analyzed the bureaucratization of the counseling function in one large high school. The focus of their study was on the perceptions and meanings that counselors used to differentiate students within the school into categories of clinical and occupational types. While *The Educational Decision Makers* made its primary contribution in the area of social *process*, the present study, which is concerned with the same phenomena, has focused upon structural variables—that is, the way in which social status affects the degree of guidance involvement. The fact that we have looked at a varied range of high schools expands the usefulness of the present study in giving preliminary insights and suggesting specific directions for further investigation in the area of the social processes involved in the counseling function.

In our society, urbanization is dominant and leads to the stabilization of socio-economically homogeneous neighbors and schools where school personnel are not c o m m u n i t y oriented and relate very tangentially to parents' backgrounds. The fulcrum of treatment accorded students may hinge more upon the decisions of those students—where they place themselves in the eyes of the institution via their choice of curriculum, occupation, and role in the school—than upon antecedent factors. This is not to refute the heavy weight of evidence that systems of socialization and social class backgrounds influence such decisions, but rather to advance the consideration of what factors are relevant when there is relatively little variance in social class backgrounds in a given population.

We have hypothesized that the social status of the student will be related to the kinds of treatment he receives from the guidance personnel w i t h i n the school. Parsons (1958) has distinguished between *ascribed* and *achieved* social status. This conception has provided a useful framework for the present study. Parson's *ascription* hypothesis states that students will be differentially involved in guidance activities based upon the occupation and education of their parents. The *achievement* hypothesis states that students will be involved in the counseling function based upon (a) their involvement in a given curriculum and choice of occupational goal, and (b) their involvement in those activities within the school that are valued by

both the formal organization of the school and the society of adolescent peers.

The direction of the relationships was predicted as follows:

1. The higher the social status of the student, either within or outside of the school, the greater will be the student's involvement in career guidance and the greater will be his knowledgeability about chosen occupation.

2. The higher the social status of the student, either within or outside of the school, the lesser will be the student's involvement in adjustment or noncareer guidance.

SUBJECTS

The subjects used in the study were members of a random sample of tenth-, eleventh-, and twelfth-grade classes at eight high schools. In all cases, the classes were constituted alphabetically rather than on the basis of aptitude or other relevant variables. The schools themselves, however, were deliberately selected so as to represent a variety of social characteristics. The schools studied included the following types: vocational-technical, urban Negro, rural farm, rural nonfarm, small urban industrial, large heterogeneous (SES) urban, male Catholic, and female Catholic.

TABLE 1

Direction of Relationships Between Three Measures of Social Status, Utilization of School Guidance Services, and Knowledgeability About Chosen Vocation*

	Parental Social Status			Projected Social Status			Visibility		
Status	Pos	Neg	p	Pos	Neg	p	Pos	Neg	p
Knowledgeability	30	12	<.001	33	9	<.001	25	17	...
Career Guidance	26	16	...	27	15	<.10	31	11	<.01
Noncareer Guidance	14	28	<.05	19	23	...	24	18	...

* Correlations between the above variables were computed separately for males and females in 10th, 11th, and 12th grades in seven coeducational secondary schools, one parochial school for boys, and one parochial school for girls.

TABLE 2

Distributions of Correlations Between Social Status Measures* and Knowledgeability About Chosen Occupation and Utilization of Career and Noncareer Guidance Services

	Knowledgeability			Career Guidance			Noncareer Guidance		
Magnitude of r	Par.	Proj.	Vis.	Par.	Proj.	Vis.	Par.	Proj.	Vis.
80–89									1
70–79	2			1	1				
60–69	2		1	1	2	2	1		2
50–59	2	4			2	3	3	2	2
40–49	3	4	3	2	1	1		2	1
30–39	5	5	5	4	3	5	1	1	4
20–29	3	6	4	4	4	7	4	2	1
10–19	4	9	4	7	9	6	3	4	10
+0–9	9	5	8	7	5	7	7	3	3
−0–9	5		5	6	7	3	5	9	9
10–19	3	2	6	6	5	3	7	5	5
20–29	1	2	3	3	3	2	4	5	1
30–39	3	2	1			1	2	4	2
40–49		1	1			2	1	1	
50–59		1		1			1	1	1
60–69								2	
70–79			1				2	1	
80–89		1					1		

* Social status measures referred to in the table are: Parental (Par.) Projected (Proj.), and Visibility (Vis.).

VARIABLES

Subjects responded to a questionnaire which provided data for the following measures:

Social Status Measures

1. *Parental Social Status*—A composite measure based upon father's occupation and education, and mother's education.

2. *Projected Social Status*—A measure based upon student's occupational goal, and/or curriculum choice. Scorers classified students' chosen occupations on the basis of education required.

3. *Visibility*—Students rated 13 extracurricular activities on a three-point scale of social status within the school. The students also indicated the extent of their *own* participation in each of the activities. The status of the activity as evaluated by the total student population of a given school was used to weight the number of years the student had participated in that activity to give a "visibility" or status-within-the-school score.

Guidance and Knowledgeability Measures

4. *Knowledgeability*—Two vocational guidance directors evaluated the accuracy of responses to three questions dealing with opportunities, average salary, and education needed for their chosen occupations.

5. *Career Guidance Time*—Student's report of amount of time spent with the counselor for the purpose of career guidance since entering high school.

6. *Noncareer Guidance Time*—Student's report of amount of time spent with the counselor for the purpose of noncareer or adjustment counseling since entering high school.

ANALYSIS

Measures of social status were intercorrelated with two counselor time measures and the knowledgeability measure separately by sex, school, and grade. Thus, for each combination of the six variables under study, correlations were computed for groups of subjects homogeneous with respect to sex, school, and grade level.

In TABLE 1 we have reported the *directionality* of the correlations obtained. Since the schools used in the study were deliberately selected so as to represent different populations of students, averaged correlations across sexes, classes, and schools would violate the stricture that such averaging be done only when the individual correlations are based on random samples from the same population. A chi-square test was used for each combination of variables to determine whether or not the breakdown of positive and negative correlations was significantly different from the 50 per cent split which would be expected by chance. In order to indicate the magnitude of the correlations, TABLE 2 has also been provided. This table presents frequency distributions of the correlations of the three social status variables and knowledgeability about chosen occupation, career guidance time, and noncareer guidance time.

RESULTS

Four major findings resulted from this research:

1. TABLES 1 and 2[1] show that in a significant majority of the groups studied, the two social status variables, Parental and Projected Social Status, correlate positively with knowledgeability about chosen occupation. In other words, the higher the social status of the parent or the occupation and curriculum chosen by the student, the more the student knows about his chosen occupation.

2. TABLES 1 and 2 show that there were positive correlations in a significant majority of the groups studied between the amount of *career guidance* received by the student and *visibility*, or the extent of the student's participation in highly valued extracurricular activities such as sports, student government, and honor clubs. The more socially involved student sees the high school counselor for career guidance for greater periods of time than the student who does not participate in social activities.

[1] Considerable fluctuation exists in the magnitude of the correlations summarized in TABLE 2. This fluctuation may be attributed in part to the small number of cases in the subgroups on which the correlations were computed. However, for student subgroups of such varied characteristics, it is possible that genuine exceptions exist to relationships observed for the general case.

3. The ascription hypothesis, which stated that students from lower socioeconomic groups would spend more time with counselors for noncareer guidance, was also confirmed as shown in TABLES 1 and 2. Projected social status and visibility did not appear to be significantly related to involvement in noncareer (or adjustment) guidance.

4. Although not shown in the tables, there was no evidence in this research for a positive correlation between knowledgeability about chosen vocation and amount of time spent in career counseling. This does not necessarily mean that career counseling was ineffective in producing greater knowledgeability about chosen vocation, since students who were *originally* less knowledgeable may have spent more time with counselors and have been brought up to the level of the initially more knowledgeable students.

CONCLUSION

It would appear that one's position within the social microcosm of the school is positively related to the amount of career guidance received, while parental social status and projected social status based upon the student's chosen occupation do not bear as consistent a relationship to utilization of such guidance services. On the other hand, knowledgeability about chosen vocation is consistently related to the latter two social status measures.

Family background appears to determine the extent to which students become involved in "adjustment" counseling. The structure of the school implies to the authors that the definition of what constitutes "adjustment" problems lies within the perceptions of the administration of the school. This finding is consistent with the middle-class bias discovered in psychiatric institutions, and the middle-class bias of teachers revealed in a number of studies.

The implications of the present study suggested that further investigations should be conducted in the following areas:

1. A longitudinal study needs to be done to see the effect of social status variables on time spent with the counselor and knowledgeability about chosen occupation. The use of post-measures, as in the present study, does not take into account changes that may occur during the student's school experience.

2. A study needs to be undertaken which can evaluate the *qualitative* differences in interaction between counselors and students that are based upon social status characteristics of the student. In other words, how does the student's social status affect the behavior of both the student and the counselor during the guidance process?

3. The sample used in the present study did not permit comparisons between institutions. A study should be conducted that evaluates the character of the institution and relates this to guidance involvement and social status variables.

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